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## Exotic Evil: The Presentation of East Asians in American Pulp Literature of The 1930s

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### INTRODUCTION

Mass-produced American fiction – whether the dime novels of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pulp magazines of 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, or paperback novels, beginning in the 1950s – has been a primary source of reading material for the American public for the past 150 years. Covering virtually every literary genre, this brand of fiction has often relied heavily on characters culled from various social and ethnic stereotypes. This paper explores the presentation of East Asians (“Orientals”) in a selected portion of the pulp literature of the 1930s.

The 1930s were a particularly dark decade for Americans, as the country was gripped in its worst economic depression ever, an epidemic of unemployment ravaged the nation, and the threat of a war in Europe with Nazi Germany loomed ominously on the horizon. This was also a time when powerful prejudice existed against Asian immigrants – prejudice that was routinely acknowledged in newspapers, state and federal legislatures, and even the U.S. Supreme Court – and negative stereotypes of Asians abounded. The authors of pulp literature, ever sensitive to the desires of their readers, seized on these stereotypes as grist for its story mills. The result was a fiction of predictable formula that heaped contemptible qualities on Asian characters while extolling the Victorian superiority of Caucasians. In short, it was merely a reflection of the times, reduced to a very low common denominator.

## PULP LITERATURE: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

American fiction writing known as “pulp” literature became popular between World Wars One and Two (primarily in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s), with literally hundreds of such magazines appearing on drugstore newsstands across the country every month, and some even more frequently. Pulp literature grew out of the American “dime novel” tradition, which originated in the 1850s. Dime novels were mass-produced serials printed on large folio sheets and which sold for three to six cents. The invention of the rotary press and the development of a transcontinental railroad system allowed for rapid and voluminous printing of such material and cheap transportation to send it to all corners of the United States very quickly. Dime novels provided the American reading public with inexpensive, sensational, adventure-oriented fiction that proved to be both popular and profitable (Bold 1996).

Pulp literature magazines were printed on heavy, low-quality paper (hence the name “pulp”) and sold for 10 cents; a year’s subscription to a monthly pulp magazine usually cost \$1. Like the dime novels before them, pulp magazines were immensely popular among the American reading public for several reasons: first, they were affordable and readily available; second, they were often written to formula, which made them easy to read; third, the writing was straightforward and the characters predictable; fourth, the pulps covered almost every subject and literary genre imaginable; and fifth, the pulps specialized in escapist, sensational, unrealistic fiction that helped Americans, particular in the 1930s, forget about the woes of the Depression and the horrifying conquests in Europe of Hitler’s Nazi war machine. Because issues of each pulp magazine appeared with great frequency, pulp writers were required to write fast and voluminously. Many of them had to produce tens of thousands of words every month to eke out a living (“to make [their] typewriter[s] smoke,” as Karl Edward Wagner [1995: xii] put it). Consequently, there was no place in pulp literature for sophisticated plots, complex characters, or the development of profound insights about the human condition.

As stated, pulps covered a dizzying arrange of genres: romance, western, horror, science-fiction, hero, sword-and-sorcery, detective, adventure, mystery, weird menace, private investigator, war, primitive jungle hero, and so on. Pulps often drew their inspiration for subject matter from books that were especially popular at the time. For example, Edgar Rice Burroughs’ tales of Tarzan, the Englishman lost as a baby in the African jungle and raised by apes, were extremely popular in hardback book form during this time. Not surprising, a number of pulps featuring Tarzan imitations appeared. More

pertinent to the theme of this paper was the popularity in book form of Fu Manchu, the evil Asian genius bent on world conquest. The creation of the English novelist Sax Rohmer, Fu Manchu would be the single most powerful influence on the presentation of East Asians in pulp literature (Sampson 1984). This point will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

Pulp-fiction characters were as sensational and unrealistic as the plots themselves. With the exception of the romance pulps, pulp literature was written primarily for a male audience, and ultimately expressed, in very basic terms, the conflict between good and evil. The evil characters (villains) were bent on harming people, sometimes very large numbers of them, whereas the heroes were committed to stopping them. These were purely black-and-white characters who could immediately be identified as good or evil. The latter possessed nothing but wicked and shameless qualities, whereas the former embodied strictly virtuous, often Victorian, attributes. Heroes were tough-talking, fearless, two-fisted, ruggedly individualistic types who delighted in the destruction of evil. Witness Captain Bruce Deragon, from Hugh B. Cave's "Tsiang House" stories: "If I had a stick of dynamite, I'd blow these bloody natives to hell, and stand there laughing at them. If I had a machine gun, I'd mow them down like rats, and be glad to see 'em die. The quicker, the better." (Cave 1997: 26; [original publication 1930]). Or Tim Donovan, from the Secret Service Operator 5 saga, "The Coming of the Mongol Hordes: " "Jimmy, I want to kill more of those Mongol devils!" (Steele 1938: 16). But they also possessed a touch of gallantry, and were never too busy, while ridding the world of evil, to save a frightened, scantily-clad (and often beautiful) young woman from the clutches of evil. Villains, by contrast, were sadistic, diabolical, and with no sympathy for the destruction and misery they wrought. As Wu Fang, one of the Oriental "Evil Masters" closely modeled on Fu Manchu, happily admits: "It has been said that I have no soul: and it is a stupid lie. I have a soul; and it is as black as my deepest dungeon" (Hogan 1936b: 106).

American female character are generally pretty and always in need of a man to save them from peril. They are intelligent, patriotic, and courageous, willing to risk their lives for their men, children, and country; Asian women, by contrast, are evil, cold and unfeeling, and as calculating and cruel as their male counterparts. They are often portrayed as being shamefully seductive and alluring, what Jessica Hagedorn (1993: xxii) has referred to as "eroticized playthings." Those who do not fit the role, such as Mohra in the Wu Fang series, are helpless pawns in the hands of their cruel masters, little more than children in need of a gallant white man to free them of their bondage. Not surprisingly, Mohra is in love with a Caucasian man (Hogan 1935, 1936a).

The pulps, therefore, became a perfect medium for airing many of the fears of

common Americans, and for expressing prejudices and even alarm at current developments within the country. One of these developments concerned the growing number of East Asians now living in the United States, and the levels of fear and distrust that both Caucasian and African Americans held toward these people. Such concerns were often expressed as the reduction of East Asians to racial stereotypes (Lee 1999; Yu 2001). Pulp literature would prove a fertile outlet for the expression of such racism and the presentation of stereotypes. As James Gunnison (2000: n.p.) has stated, "Remember, this was the pulp era and racial stereotypes were the norm."

### **EAST ASIANS IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE 1930s**

By the 1930s, a sizeable population of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants and their offspring were living in the United States, their conspicuous presence on the mainland having begun with Chinese immigrants from Hawaii landing in California in 1849 (Takaki 1998). East Asians had actually settled in the U.S. earlier, although their numbers were quite small (Zia 2000: 23-25). Whereas Koreans were frequently mistaken for Japanese by Caucasian Americans and Filipinos were viewed as "our little brown brothers" - the primitives in need of a dose of American civilizing - Japanese and Chinese immigrants, shunned by the larger society, developed communities within American cities to preserve traditions and draw on each other for assistance in everything from housing to employment to business loans to survival in a hostile new world (Takaki 1998: Chapters 5, 6, and 9). By the turn of the century, the genesis of Chinatowns in a number of North American cities - San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento, New York, Vancouver - created the most enduring physical manifestation of the East Asian presence in the United States.

Chinatowns would become objects of such curiosity to Caucasian Americans that they quickly became tourist attractions, with their phony underground gambling halls and opium dens. The Chinese community would respond to this development with mixed feelings: on the one hand, the tourist industry brought much-needed capital to Chinatowns, but on the other, the sensationalized depictions of Chinatown life undermined much of the integrity of tradition that served as the foundation for the Chinese experience in the United States (Lee 1999; Takaki 1998). Chinatowns would become the central setting for many of the pulp stories that depicted the inherent evil of the "Oriental" (Sampson 1984).

The physical appearance of East Asians, their strong adherence to a traditional way of life, their economic struggles and competition for jobs with whites in America, and the

alien nature of East Asian cultures, languages, and religions in the eyes of Caucasian Americans, conspired to create an atmosphere of sharp racial discrimination. As noted above, this was often expressed as a reduction of East Asians to stereotypes. Lee (1999: 8-12) defines six common stereotypes of the "Oriental" that have prevailed in American popular culture since the latter half of the nineteenth century. As two of them, the Oriental as model minority and as gook, did not surface until the late 1960s (Lee 1999: 10), they are not pertinent to the discussion of this paper. The other four, however, are relevant, and it will be demonstrated that East Asians are invariably presented as one of these stereotypes whenever they appear in pulp literature. These stereotypes include the East Asian as pollutant, coolie, deviant, and - most dramatically of all - the yellow peril.

Lee (1999: 9) defines the pollutant stereotype as originating in California in the mid-nineteenth century. In the enthusiasm of westward expansion, the presence of the early Chinese in California "constituted an alien presence" that disrupted notions of a racially free and pure settlement of the American West. By the 1880s, the stereotype of the coolie had been established, as East Asian immigrants were working primarily for Caucasians, and became viewed as servile and unfree. The stereotype also sought to exclude East Asians from skilled work and trades, and perpetuated the image that "Orientals" could neither work for themselves, but had to be controlled and commanded, nor learn the skills necessary to become anything but a subordinate common laborer. The deviant stereotype stemmed from the increase of Chinese workers in domestic jobs, and the general fear by Caucasians that such close interactions between whites and Chinese would provoke sexual temptations that would inevitably lead to miscegenation. This was an especially dangerous fear, because it suggested the possibility of the polluting of the Caucasian race by "Oriental" blood (Lee 1999: 9-10).

The yellow peril stereotype derives from quite a different source. It was actually Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany - the architect of World War One - who first coined the term; long concerned about growing military power in the East, the Kaiser was extremely alarmed when, in 1895, Japan invaded China. His anxiety was captured in the phrase "Die gelbe Gefahr!" - "the yellow peril!" (Tuchman 1950). In this context, East Asians were viewed as a "threat to nation, race, and family" (Lee 1999: 10). Hordes of Asians were envisioned as "invading" the United States, taking over the country through intermarriage and polluting the Caucasian race, through military means, and by subtly replacing American culture with their own. The Fu Manchu stories are classic examples of yellow-peril fears. Where pulp literature is concerned, it is somewhat ironic that, given that Kaiser Wilhelm coined the term in response to a Japanese invasion of China, the Asians perpetrating the yellow peril are almost always Chinese. This likely has more to

do, however, with the influence of the Fu Manchu stories that with the historic origin of the term.

With this background, examples of pulp literature may be examined. According to Sampson (1984: 13-14), pulp literature featuring East Asians tend to focus either on "Evil Masters" (who are always Chinese and watered-down versions of Fu Manchu) intent on taking over the world, or intrepid Caucasians venturing into the exotic world of Asia, usually in its jungles and uncharted regions. In many respects this reflected prevailing American perceptions of East Asia: the cities with their seamy, corrupt, crime-filled streets and the dense jungles populated by savages awaiting the arrival of civilization. Stories occur primarily in western cities where there are Chinatowns or in contrived jungle settings. To this I would add a third type of story, often set in Chinatowns as well, where an individual hero must save someone from Oriental evil. In such stories, there is no Fu Manchu-type intent on taking over the world, but East Asians are underhanded and evil just the same.

The examination of pulp literature that follows begins with the "Evil Masters" stories, then stories of less ambitious Asian threats, and lastly a sampling of stories set in the remote jungles of East Asia.

### **EAST ASIANS IN PULP LITERATURE I: CHINATOWNS, EVIL MASTERS, AND THE YELLOW PERIL**

Fear of an invasion of large numbers of Chinese were expressed in California little more than 20 years after the first Chinese arrived in 1849. Long before Kaiser Wilhelm created the reference to the "Yellow Peril," many Americans were concerned about the growing number of "heathen" East Asians immigrating to the West Coast. Toward this end, a variety of laws and court decisions followed that sought to prevent foreign-born Asians from receiving U.S. citizenship as well as to limit severely the number of immigrants who could enter the country (Takaki 1998: 108-112). Pulp literature would find much fertile ground to till in the idea of invading hordes of East Asians raping and pillaging the land, intent on the destruction of the Caucasian race, particularly Americans. As Wu Fang states, "The white man in bondage is among my fondest dreams; no horror visited upon him shall be too great" (Hogan 1936b: 105). Shan Hi Mung, the despicable leader of the Mongol hordes in the *Secret Service Operator 5* pulp series, echoes these sentiments: "But I want America! I want to be the master of America!" (Steele 1938: 32).

The pulps embraced Victorian values such as honor, family, patriotism, and Chris-

tian paternalism, so what could be more appropriate than to have a strong, fearless, patriotic, heroic man fighting against incredible odds to save his country and its good people from the evils of a foreign invader? Among those pulps that employed East Asian villains in this formula were *Secret Service Operator 5*, *The Mysterious Wang Fu*, and *The Spider*. In each case, the threat from "Orientals" stemmed from one evil genius running the show, often shrouded in mystery. As discussed above, these creations all took their cues from the character of Fu Manchu; according to Sampson (1984: 14), Fu Manchu is a "Crime Emperor and War Lord, a Plotter and distinguished representative of the Yellow Peril." The pulp offshoots, conversely, generally embodied only one of Fu Manchu's attributes: Shan Hi Mung appears as a War Lord, but is really more a representative of the Yellow Peril, whereas Wu Fang and the various shadowy "Dragon" figures from *The Spider* are essentially Plotters (i.e., those trying to bring America to its knees through deadly threats).

*The Secret Service Operator 5* magazine featured a long-running saga of the invasion and conquest of the United States by the Purple Empire – a consortium of international powers brokered by Germany and its evil leader, Rudolph I. The Mongol hordes have been recruited, and it is their vicious military assault that has left the U.S. in ruins. A small band of intrepid Americans, led by Jimmy Christopher, a government agent known as Operator 5, fights the advancing Mongols as they storm west to east toward New York City.

The Mongol soldiers are variously described as "yellow," "rats," "dogs," "devils," "heathens," "Chinks," and "coolies." Their sadistic and ruthless behavior fit these descriptions well. At the beginning of "The Coming of the Mongol Hordes" (Steele 1938), Jimmy Christopher and his aide, Tim Donovan, are spying on the advancing hordes. They come to the remains of a town where women and children have been rounded up, and the Mongol soldiers are preparing to violate and slaughter them. When the soldiers are confronted by Christopher and Donovan, they show themselves to be base cowards, even though they greatly outnumber their adversaries. None of the Asians in this story, or in "War Masters of the Orient" (Steele 1936), have any redeeming qualities whatsoever. When Diane Elliot, Christopher's beautiful and brave girlfriend, is captured by the Mongol soldiers, the military leaders lust after her shamelessly; an Asian woman is present, and becomes extremely jealous of Diane's clear superiority. The woman, Mistra, then takes great delight in learning that if Diane fails to yield important information about Christopher's whereabouts, she will be brutally tortured (Steele 1938). The *Operator 5* stories are filled with patriotic references, particularly to the American War of Independence, and Victorian values such as family and Christianity play central roles



in American attitudes. At the conclusion of "The Coming of the Mongol Hordes," Jimmy Christopher exclaims, "God will yet grant America freedom!" (Steele 1938: 66).

In the Wu Fang stories, another intrepid American government man, Val Kildare, assisted by the adventurous newspaperman, Jerry Hazzard (who is in love with Mohra, the lovely Asian woman who is cruelly manipulated and held in thrall by Wu Fang), dedicates his life to stopping the Oriental evil genius (Hogan 1935, 1936b). Once again, the language used to describe East Asians is filled with references to "yellow," "Chinks," "devils," and so on. Wu Fang is a Plotter, an evil soul of incredible wealth and influence who uses the alien labyrinths of various Chinatowns to hide out and mastermind his plans to bring America to its knees. He is capable of recruiting many different people to work for him, everyone from Chinese lackeys to white policemen to European mercenaries (such as Gunnar in "The Case of the Suicide Tomb" [Hogan 1935]). These people are wholly subservient to Wu Fang, and apparently live in mortal fear of him. When spoken to, they refer to him as "master" and follow his instructions to the letter.

Wu Fang prefers to use modern science to do his bidding, searching for virile diseases that can be turned into plagues to set upon the American people. He has extensive laboratories in which such evil concoctions are created and refined. He also is a master of hybridization, creating armies of small monsters – variously combinations of lizards, rats, snakes, and other small animals – that are both fearless and deadly. He is also far too intelligent to be imprisoned by conventional techniques. In "The Case of the Green Death," he virtually allows himself to be arrested and jailed, and then escapes effortlessly (Hogan 1936a). His ability to hide his bases of operations deep in the mysterious bowels of Chinatowns makes him all but impossible to capture, and even when he strays from his lair, he is far too clever to be apprehended. The best that Val Kildare can hope for is to avert the present disaster created by Wu Fang, and then prepare himself for the next one.

The Spider stories that feature Oriental "Evil Masters" follow a similar formula to the Wu Fang series. Here, an additional twist is the constant reminder that one can never trust an Asian (Stockbridge 1936, 1939). In "Claws of the Golden Dragon," Richard Wentworth (the man who operates undercover as the Spider) is betrayed by Fu Chang, one of his friends and informants in Chinatown. The evil Dragon who is creating mass death through the use of black orchids proves to be none other than Fu Chang himself, whom Wentworth must kill in the climactic scene (Stockbridge 1939). In these stories, Wentworth is described as a man who understands Asians as well as any Caucasian every could. He has a servant and driver, Ram Singh, who is a Sikh, and who shows himself to be an ideal Asian by being completely faithful and subservient to Wentworth. Ram

Singh, in other words, is the prototype of the Asian coolie.

In "Slaves of the Dragon," Stockbridge (1936) creates a typical Asian woman in the character of Ya Hsai. Beautiful, confident, seductive, she attempts to lure Wentworth into a trap so that he cannot disrupt the plans of her master. The author takes no heed of differences in Asian cultures and languages, and has Ya Hsai – clearly a Chinese woman -- address Wentworth with the Japanese titular "san." The Dragon, Ya Hsai's master, believes American women to be vastly superior to Mongolian men in their intellect, and is kidnapping them to provide a mating pool for Mongolian men. The cross-breeding will result in a race of master warriors who are also highly intelligent. Nita, Wentworth's girlfriend, is kidnapped, and immediately recognizes what is going on: "She knew the Mongols, of course, powerful uncivilized brutes from the North of China. Many of them lived by banditry and raiding as their Tartar ancestors had before them" (Stockbridge 1936: 37). The Dragon outlines his plan to the captured Nita: "Thus will a certain nation breed powerful and brainy children for its future slaves and wars...You are to become the mother of half-breed slaves who will labor and fight for their dear mother – or should I say father – country" (Stockbridge 1936: 37). Nita, a heroic sort, leads an escape of the captive women. Before that, she sees one of them, who is of ill health, killed with a knife and her body thrown in a swamp. Cruel, sadistic Oriental women are sent to guard the captives, and use whips to torment them. In the end, it is Ya Hsai who turns on the Dragon and kills him. She tells Wentworth the Dragon was a traitor, even to China. He was working for another country, hoping to build a Mongol army to overrun China. Once again the point is clear: no "Oriental" can be trusted!

## EAST ASIANS IN PULP LITERATURE II: CHINATOWNS AND SMALL EVILS

According to Sampson (1984: 14), the Asian enemy portrayed in the following stories is a small-time Criminal Emperor; unlike Wu Fang or the Dragon, he has no ambition to conquer a nation or enslave its people. Instead, he presides over a business of vice that occasionally affects someone who is worthy of being saved. This Asian criminal lord is a thief, a dope dealer, a smuggler, or engaged in equally despicable pursuits. Because he runs a fairly small operation, and therefore is accessible (unlike Wu Fang, for example), he can be handled by one tough, two-fisted hero. These stories permit the reader ready identification with the physically fearless protagonist, who – although a bit rough around the edges – is clearly the product of a clean, Victorian society that recognizes the potential pollution to its core values posed by aliens such as "Orientals." In this stories the Oriental as deviant and, to a lesser extent, pollutant, are central to the

construction of their characters.

Hugh B. Cave, one of the most prolific of all pulp writers, contributed to this genre with weird-menace stories such as "The Crawling Ones" (Cave 1936) and "The Pain Room" (Cave 1934). In both stories, a beautiful young woman is victimized by an evil Asian criminal lord, and a red-blooded American hero comes to her rescue. Cave uses many of the devices already discussed: the Chinatown setting of mysterious mazes and underworld vice (he refers to it as "the evil borders of Chinatown" (Cave 1995: 79 [original publication 1934])); the shamelessly vile Asians who populate it; and the complete lack of trustworthiness in Asians. As an example of the latter, the character of Li Tsan is a refined, well-educated physician who lives beyond Chinatown's evil borders, and he is willing to help the hero, Paul Maury, in "The Pain Room." Later, when Maury uncovers a white slavery ring in the bowels of Chinatown, who but Li Tsan is running it, a cunning, soulless man able to bribe the police to keep his actions hidden?

Steve Fisher's stories "Shanghai Murder" (Fisher 1935) and "The Sacred Dragon" (Fisher 1936) involve smaller-scale crime, usually theft or embezzlement. These stories run more to the detective formula, where the swindling East Asian is caught in his own trap by a clever Caucasian policeman. In "Shanghai Murder," a rich white banker who is thought to have double-crossed his Asian accomplice is targeted for murder, as the accomplice bribes the banker's butler to do the deed. Once again, this underscores the lack of trustworthiness of Asians. In O. B. Myers' "Jewels for the Dead," (Myers 1936), Chinese are depicted as so rapacious and greedy that they even profane their own time-honored traditions. In this instance, it is the funeral of a prominent Chinaman whose precious jewels are being stolen through transport in the very coffin where he lays. Once again, the emphasis here is on the utter lack of scruples and honor – positive Victorian values – in "Oriental" behavior.

### **EAST ASIANS AND PULP LITERATURE III: IN THE JUNGLE**

Pulp stories of this type featured tough, swaggering white men who ventured – sometimes recklessly and lawlessly – into the exotic East Asian jungles for purposes of establishing colonial outposts, seeking treasure and wealth, and generally trying to bring civilization to the savage denizens of the jungle. Hugh B. Cave's "Tsiang House" stories, written in the early 1930s, are a particularly outstanding example of this type of pulp literature, and is the focus of discussion here.

The Tsiang House stories feature a remote English colonial outpost in the jungles of Borneo. The stories are infused with a Victorian paternalism that evokes the need for

Caucasians to civilize the rest of the world; that Southeast Asia is the setting is hardly surprising. At this time much of Asia was under imperialist control by European and American governments. England (India, Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia), Holland (Indonesia, East Indies), France (Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam), and the U.S. (Philippines) held colonial sway over much of the continent. The common perception was that such places were savage and in desperate need of being brought into the industrialized twentieth century, replete with the Victorian notion of Caucasian and Christian superiority. Manned by Captain Bruce Deragon and Major Jack Corony, the outpost becomes a refuge for all manner of European degenerates who rob temples of Buddha statues, smuggle opium, and engage in various other equally unsavory practices. Such behavior incites the anger of the already bellicose, vicious natives of the jungle, who are forever trying to wipe out Tsiang House altogether. Against such formidable odds do Messrs. Deragon and Corony try to remain both alive and sane.

The presentation of East Asians is somewhat curious. Although located in the jungles of Borneo, Tsiang House features servants who are all Chinese. Typically, they are sly, treacherous creatures who cannot be trusted. In "The Sins of the Fool" (Cave 1930a), Major Corony notes that although there are five servants in Tsiang House, only two can be trusted; that proves to be untrue, as Tso Lin, one of those supposedly trustworthy, proves to be the villain. Other Asians are presented either as savages or as coolies. A good example is Lo Yog, a servant in "A White Man Dies" (Cave 1930c), who pretends to be completely compliant and obedient to his English masters, then reaches for a knife to kill one of them as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Another servant, Lao San, proves himself to be a finer example of the Oriental coolie, continually warning Captain Deragon of danger in "The Dagger of Tsiang" (Cave 1930d). Deragon even saves Lao San from being run through with a sword by shooting the cursed native who attempted the bloody act. Even so, Major Corony accuses Lao San of being a liar, that he cannot be trusted; strangely enough, this proves to be false, and Lao San is shown to have been honest in his warnings, which have ultimately saved Captain Deragon from death.

Eastern religion is not spared, either. In "The Sins of the Fool" (Cave 1930a), a statue of Buddha is specially altered to cause to death to anyone who touches its ruby eyes. "The Green Eyes of Confucius" (Cave 1930e) opens with the sentence, "When a white man treks into the British North Borneo jungles, among the native followers of Confucius, Buddha, Lao-Tse, and Satan, there is bound to be trouble" (Cave 1997: 39). Clearly, Confucius and Buddha are here equated with Satan, assuring the reader of the implicit evil of such religions, and, by extension, of those who follow their teachings.

The Tsiang House stories repeatedly portray East Asians as stealthy, nasty, humorless

people intent of destroying the English presence in the jungle ("Cry Wolf" [Cave 1930b] is a particularly blatant example). Their land is fraught with danger, as it contains no trappings of civilized comforts or laws, and requires that any foreigner be a strong, highly moral character to survive there. The courage and moral fiber displayed primarily by Captain Deragon is completely absent in any East Asian character. The very best the natives can offer is the coolie – the non-assertive, completely servile man who lives to please and obey his Western masters. Such a portrayal accords well with Victorian attitudes regarding the inherent inferiority of Asiatic peoples in the eyes of Westerners; the civilizing process must begin by making East Asian subservient to the will and the rule of Caucasians.

## DISCUSSION

The decade of the 1930s was a difficult one in the United States. Crippled by a severe economic depression, the nation witnessed the highest levels of unemployment in its history. Millions of people were uprooted and forced to relocate in the hopes of finding jobs. Competition for jobs and work opportunities between Caucasians, African-Americans, Asians, and Hispanics heightened racial tension both locally and nationally. The Victorian attitudes that had pervaded American thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were rapidly eroding, yet Americans clung desperately to them in the hopes that the maintenance of such values would end the domestic turmoil. Among the most prominent of these values was a sense of moral and racial superiority, and a God-given responsibility to bring civilization and progress to the primitive regions of the world (Lee 1999; Yu 2001). The literature of the pulp magazines was a classic reflection of this mentality.

The pulps were escapist reading, shallow reflections of the ills that Americans faced in the 1930s. Stereotypes were necessary as cheap representations of good and evil, and convenient evil stereotypes were found in those who fell outside the mainstream of American society. It was not only Asians who were so portrayed; fears of the European conquests of Nazi Germany spawned numerous evil German characters, such as Rudolph I in the *Operator 5* stories, who is all the more loathsome when he expresses his bitter contempt for Americans: "I hate them – the Americans. I want to see everyone of them die in agony" (Steele 1938: 33). Many of the western pulps portrayed Native Americans as little more than savages bent on wiping out the Caucasian race.

The stereotypic portrayal of Asians did not end with the pulps, however. An East Asian enemy in World War Two, compounded by a powerful Communist movement in

China in the late 1940s, reinforced many Americans' fears of invasions from the East by largely untrustworthy, secretive, scheming people. In 1965, those fears were reinforced yet again by two events: first, new immigration legislation that allowed hundreds of thousands of Asians to immigrate to the US (many of whom were moving into predominantly African American neighborhoods in large cities); and second, America's direct military involvement in the civil war in Vietnam. By the mid-1970s, a struggling U.S. economy, the influx of more than 1 million Southeast Asian refugees, the unrivaled strength of Japan on the international economic market, and the portrayal of Asian Americans as a "model minority" (based on the academic achievement of a small minority), served to remind both Caucasian and African Americans of the threats posed by those from the East on the well-being of American capitalism and values. By the 1980s, frequent news stories of the takeover of American businesses and corporations by Japanese interests left many American fearing that soon enough Japan would own the United States and everything in it. Studies of Japan, according to Lee (1999: 206), "argued that Japanese capitalism was a predatory reflection of a much darker aspect of an essentialized Japanese character." Only a decade earlier, such studies had focused on Japan's innovative economic genius in transforming the world market.

Hostility toward Japan was voiced in articulate fashion in Michael Crichton's 1991 novel, *Rising Sun*. All the fears of the common American were exploited. Japanese businessmen were portrayed as heartless predators, the yellow peril in suits and ties, while the lower-ranking ones served as little more than coolies for their executive masters. There are dormitories of Caucasian women in Los Angeles who serve as sex slaves for visiting Japanese executives (the Oriental as deviant). Every conversation with a Japanese becomes a kind of cat-and-mouse game, as they can never answer questions directly, but prefer to speak in deliberately ambiguous terms. Once again, the notion here is that to trust a Japanese is to be ultimately exploited by them. Interestingly, the use of two particular character types - a younger policemen investigating a murder and an older expert on things Japanese serving as his mentor - facing a powerful, unknown "exotic" force hearkens back to the basic formula of the Fu Manchu stories (Lee 1999: 212).

A year after the novel's publication, riots erupted in central Los Angeles over an incident in which an African American man, Rodney King, was severely beaten by four white Los Angeles policemen; the beating was caught on videotape and played for the world. The tension between African Americans and Korean Americans galvanized during the riots, as the former deliberately targeted, destroyed, and looted more than 2,300 businesses owned by Korean Americans. As if to punctuate this in savagely bold relief, the 1993 film version of *Rising Sun* cast Wesley Snipes, an African American, in

the lead, and his teaming with Sean Connery (as his mentor) appears to underscore the call for Caucasians and African Americans – the “true” Americans – to join forces in eradicating the real threat to the United States, the polluting force, which originates in the East. The poster for the film, showing Snipes and Connery against a Los Angeles background shrouded by a Japanese flag, evokes the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as if to compel us to ask whether we have truly learned our lesson (Lee 1999: 214–215).

Despite decades of searching for identity in the United States, despite having made great strides in the face of racial prejudice, and despite a population that has exceeded 10 million, Asian Americans today continue to be faced with portrayal in the popular media as “strange and exotic,” as American but differently so, as subtly curious people who still cannot be trusted and accepted into the American mainstream, and who yet may be scheming to beget one final, victorious yellow-peril invasion (Zia 2001: 315–317).

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Pulp literature was designed to be escapist, sensational, and clear-cut in its presentation of good versus evil. It can hardly be held up as a barometer for the breadth of tensions, feelings, and perspectives of a society at a given point in time. Nevertheless, it embodied racial and ethnic stereotypes as a convenient means of separating good guys from bad, and from demarcating the virtues of a Victorian mentality – a Eurocentric superiority with emphasis on family, honor, patriotism, and Christian paternalism – from all others. East Asians – “Orientals” – quickly became inviting targets as embodiments of evil and alien qualities. That the stereotypes portrayed still have use in American society today is troubling, given that the United States is and always will be a land of immigrants. As Henry Yu (2001: 203) points out, “racial practices have had a long history in the United States and have produced profound legacies that cannot be wished away as mere cultural differences.” The literature of the pulp magazines is yet one more reminder of those legacies.

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